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No 3.

Dr. *BISSE*'s

SERMON

Preach'd at the

BATH.

G.R.
DE

The Chriſtian Uſe of the World.

A

SERMON

Preach'd at the

ABBEY-CHURCH

IN

BATH.

October 21. 1716.

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G.R. III.

1 Cor. vii. 31.

And they that uſe this world, as not abuſing it: for the faſhion of this world paſſeth away.

THO' God, *from whom and to whom are all things*, hath made them all ultimately for himſelf; yet hath he placed them in a chain of ſubordination, one thing in ſubſervience to another, all things being made for man, as man is for God. For when God firſt made man, he did, as by an original Charter, conſign this world, and all things in it, over to him for his uſe and dominion. And tho' the extent of this

Charter was limited in divers articles by the Levitical law, which put difference between *clean things and unclean*, lawful and unlawful; yet ſince its renewal by the goſpel of liberty, we are again veſted with a full power to uſe at pleaſure, *to kill and eat*, whatever is contained in the great compaſs of nature, which is but a reſemblance of that great ſheet *Peter* in a viſion ſaw let down from heaven to the earth; wherein he was forbidden to call thenceforth *any thing common or unclean, which God had cleanſed.* Wherefore all things are in their natures now lawful for us, and many things are neceſſary for our uſe, and more for our comfort: and if we will not allow our ſelves to make this uſe of the world, then, as the apoſtle ſaith in a like caſe, *we muſt needs go out of the world.* No; neceſſity obliges us to uſe the world; but religion adviſes us only not to abuſe it. And the reaſon of this advice is grounded on the ſhortneſs of life, and the uncertainty of the world. *Now this I ſay, brethren, the time is ſhort: it remaineth that they that have wives, be as tho' they had none; and they that weep, be as tho' they wept not; and they that rejoice, as tho' they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as tho' they poſſeſſed not: and* in our general conduct, *they that uſe this world, as not*

not abuſing it; for the faſhion of this world paſſeth away.

But then he ſpeaks unto *brethren*, to ſuch as believed and had hopes of a better life: for to unbelievers, the ſhortneſs of life and uncertainty of things would have a contrary influence, exhorting them to ſeize and uſe theſe tranſitory goods with all the arts and degrees of indulgence. *Let us eat and drink, if to morrow we muſt die.* Tho' I cannot but obſerve, that the moſt rational ſect among the Heathen philoſophers did from theſe very arguments teach their followers to bring themſelves not only to an indifference, but even inſenſibility. Becauſe they ſaw the objects from without were too fleeting to be enjoy'd, and yet too inviting to be reſiſted, therefore they taught men to root out their very paſſions; and by this courſe to render the mind perfectly inſenſible to impreſſions, whether good or evil, proſperous or unfortunate; to reduce it to ſuch a ſtability or rather ſtubbornneſs of temper, that according to the literal ſenſe of the text, if *they wept, they might be as tho' they wept not:* or *if they rejoiced, they might be as tho' they rejoiced not.*

But Chriſtianity, which corrects the beſt leſſons of philoſophy, teaches its diſciples not

thus vainly to endeavour to extirpate, but only to regulate the paſſions; to bring their minds not to an inſenſibility, which is impracticable; but only to an indifference, which is rational. We are indeed of our ſelves to many things of the world indifferent, becauſe of the meanneſs of their natures: we neither grieve at their abſence, nor rejoice in their poſſeſſion. And to the beſt things of it we ſhould be ſo in a proportion'd degree, becauſe of the uncertainty of their continuance. If we are pleaſed with the enjoyment, it ſhould be with a limited paſſion: if we *rejoice*, we ſhould be *as tho' we rejoiced not*: and if we enlarge our poſſeſſions, it ſhould be with a reſign'd intention: if we *buy*, we ſhould be *as tho' we poſſeſſed not*; becauſe *the faſhion of this world*, with its enjoyments and poſſeſſions, *paſſeth away*.

To expreſs this indifference required in the text more emphatically, ſome have thought, that the rendring might be thus amended; οἱ χρώμενοι τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ, ὡς μὴ καταχρώμενοι· *they that uſe this world, as not uſing it:* and thus the vulgar *Latin*, *qui utuntur hoc mundo, tanquam non utantur*. Now tho' this interpretation may ſeem countenanced from the foregoing inſtances in the text, *they that weep, as tho' they wept not*, &c. yet ſeeing the

the Church hath thought fit, the participles in the original, χρώμενοι and καταχρώμενοι, being ſomewhat different, to take the latter in the more enlarged ſenſe, thoſe words of interpretation which the Church *hath put in my mouth, them will I ſpeak*; judging it always, and in all places of holy ſcripture, my duty, as well as ſafety, ſo to do.

In diſcourſing on the words, I ſhall endeavour

I. To explain the advice of the apoſtle here given, namely, how in the chief things of this world we ought *to uſe them, ſo as not to abuſe them.*

II. I ſhall enforce the obſervance of it by the argument ſubjoined, taken from the changes and uncertainty of them; *for the faſhion of this world paſſeth away.*

Now by the world is meant this habitable world, the ſeat of man, and all things contained in it, ordained for his uſe: which being almoſt infinite in number, and each liable to infinite abuſes, I ſhall reduce them to the three generals contained in the definition of St. *John*; *All that is in the world, is the luſt of the fleſh, and the luſt of the eyes, and the pride of life:* which by the uſual interpretation are pleaſures, riches, and honours. 1 *Ep.* ii. 16.

Now

Now there are three ways, wherein theſe principal things of the world are chiefly abuſed, and which we ought principally to guard againſt.

1*ſt*, When they are miſapplied to the purpoſes of intemperance,

2*dly*, Of Miſchief,

3*dly*, Of Vanity.

In the firſt caſe, they are abuſed to the hurt of our ſelves; in the ſecond, to the hurt of others; in the third, to the hurt or waſting of the things thus abuſed.

1*ſt*, The moſt uſual abuſe of this world is, when it is miſapply'd to the purpoſes of intemperance, or in other terms, devoted to a life of pleaſures: for if every ſingle exceſs be an abuſe, then doubtleſs an habitual courſe, running through all kinds of exceſs, muſt be the greateſt breach upon this direction, of not abuſing this world. And truly in pleaſures lies the great danger of abuſing the world, the honours and riches of it conſpiring with, and being made miniſterial to theſe.

Now as to the pleaſures of this world, of
1 Tim. v. 6. thoſe *that live in them*, the ſcripture ſaith plainly, *they are even dead whilſt they live*. And this life, which in a ſpiritual ſenſe is thus called death, is in a natural ſenſe certainly the loweſt kind of life. There is nothing in it new,

new, nothing noble. 'Tis a repetition of the ſame actions, and thoſe very mean, and founded in our infirmities. Eating and drinking, tho' they make ſo great a part in the ſtate and recreations of life, are but the confeſſions of wants: they are owing to hunger and thirſt, thoſe two great evils complained of in the dwellings of the poor. And yet ſo mean is the condeſcenſion or reliſh of the luxuriſt who *fares ſumptuouſly every day*, that in the midſt of his affluence he is daily found to envy the poor man for the enjoyment of thoſe mean appetites; and takes more pains to ſollicit their return, than the other doth to provide againſt it. And what is the end of this ignoble induſtry? why, when he hath eaten and is full, being loaded with luxury, he takes refuge in diverſions, wherein reaſon has but a ſmall ſhare; and when tired with diverſions, his laſt refuge is in ſleep, wherein reaſon has nothing to do. Thus what is ſaid of a man blinded with honour, may be better affirmed of a man intoxicated with pleaſure, that he *may be compared to the beaſts that periſh.* In the day time, his pleaſures are of the ſame inferior kind, the pleaſures of mere ſenſe: and in the night, what difference or diſtinction of reaſon is there between the man ſleeping in downe, and the beaſt lying in the ſtall?

Such

Such is a life of pleaſures, made up of a circulation of little mean actions and enjoyments: and however relieved by the interchange of art, or ſet off by the ſplendor and attendance of the world, is but a low, tireſome, pitiable life; far below the dignity of man, (who excluſive of Religion) is form'd by nature it ſelf for better things, for nobler pleaſures than theſe.

But then the profeſſion of ſuch a life in thoſe, who make profeſſion of Chriſtianity, has a very ſtrange appearance: it reſembles the frantick and idolatrous demeanour and revolt of the *Iſraelites*, who having ſet up an idol of their own device, are deſcribed as doing nothing, but only that *they ſat down to eat and drink, and roſe up to play.* But ſuch a profeſſion is no other than a renouncing of the Chriſtian religion. *No man can ſerve two maſters*, either thro' the oppoſition or interfering of their commands: and nothing can be ſo oppoſite, and ſo inconſiſtent, as the goſpel of Chriſt and the ſchool of *Epicurus*. He that will be the diſciple of Chriſt, muſt deny himſelf, and take up his croſs, whenever his maſter commands. The diſciple of *Epicurus* is taught to deny himſelf nothing that is agreeable, to take up nothing that is painful. No ſelf-denials in pleaſure, no inflictions of

of pennance are enjoyned his followers; ſo that the ſervants of the one are conſtantly found to hate the ſervants of the other: they that hold to the one, deſpiſe thoſe that hold to the other. Thus *the preaching of Chriſt crucifyed, was to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*, eſpecially among the learned ſcoffers at *Athens*; and doubtleſs to no ſchool in *Athens* was it ſo great fooliſhneſs, as to that of the *Epicureans*.

But alas! 'tis not at *Athens* only, that Seat of the Sciences; nor among the *Greeks*, that diſcerning people; but in every city, and among every people, this ſect hath had its diſciples, men *enemies to the croſs of Chriſt, whoſe God is their belly, who mind earthly things*, and who ſtudy nothing but their enjoyment: to whom if the doctrine of the Croſs, that only banner of ſalvation, be preach'd at this day, will with a ſilent deriſion ſay of the preachers, as their forefathers did of St. *Paul* himſelf, *what will this babler ſay?* Acts xvii. 18.

But notwithſtanding the condemnation which the goſpel of Chriſt paſſeth upon theſe its enemies, yet to thoſe who follow its directions in ſeeking for a better world, it allows the beſt enjoyment of this. As for exceſs, this is a meaſure condemned by reaſon

as

as well as religion: it is a load which nature loudly complains of in men, and in brute beaſts abſolutely rejects. But ſuch an enjoyment of this world, in ſuch proportions, and within ſuch bounds, as reaſon preſcribes and nature delights in, Chriſtianity gives her conſent, and ſeals it with her approbation: for 'tis true with regard to the law of nature, as well as of *Moſes*, that *Chriſt came not to deſtroy, but to fulfil it*. Which appears from hence, becauſe the Chriſtian religion never appears ſo much to advantage and in ſo great a luſtre, as when placed in the midſt of affluence. There have been many great and famous ſaints, who have ſhut themſelves up from the world; whoſe acts of ſanctity and contempt of the world are celebrated to this day. But without derogation to the memory of theſe holy perſons, thoſe ought to be counted the greateſt ſaints and the beſt Chriſtians, who have not fled the world, but have conquered it: who have practiſed a regular temperance in a continued courſe of affluence, and have enjoyed with thankfulneſs, what others have rejected perhaps with a leſs acceptable diſdain.

Neither is the Chriſtian religion rigorous or illiberal in its conceſſions, being as great an enemy to covetouſneſs as to extravagance, denouncing

nouncing its curſes upon thoſe miſers that uſe not the world at all, as well as upon the prodigals that abuſe it. Indeed it rather interpoſes not in the government and œconomy of particular perſons, any more than in the governments of publick ſtates and kingdoms; leaving every man to thoſe rules and methods of conduct, which good ſenſe, the cuſtom of the world, and his ſtation in it, hath uſually ſettled. Thus religion commands all its profeſſors to *uſe hoſpitality without grudging*. But what hoſpitality is, that varying with every man's condition and rank (what is hoſpitality in the great, being prodigality in inferiors; and what is extravagance in the ſmall, being perhaps but parſimony in ſuperiors) that Chriſtianity determines not, nor interpoſes her judgment; but leaves every man to the direction of reaſon, and rather reproves than accepts of an appeal to her in theſe things of common life, as without or below her juriſdiction: *why even of your ſelves judge ye not what is right?* Luke xii. 57.

And here I muſt take leave to obſerve in favour of the Chriſtian religion, that it is ſo far from being an auſtere judge on the liberties of mankind, that on the contrary it reproves them for being ſo; yea, it condemns the

the world not more for its wickedneſs, than for its cenſoriouſneſs.

For ſince 'tis impoſſible, that any man's liberty in the uſe of the world, which depends upon variety of perſonal and ſecret circumſtances, ſhould be judged by another man's conſcience, therefore it ſeverely expoſtulates with all men of whatever rank or magnitude, *who art thou, O man! that judgeſt another?* No: the Chriſtian religion ought not to be hated for its rigour, but admired for its mildneſs, which far paſſeth the bounds of common humanity, being an advocate for mens innocence, when the world is an accuſer; and being merciful to their failures, over which we are apt unmercifully to inſult: the judgment it paſſes even upon the criminal liberties of perſons, reſembling that which Chriſt paſſed upon the woman brought before him, who ſent away the accuſers with confuſion, and the offender with pardon.

But tho' it inſtates every man in his juſt liberty in the uſe of this world, exempting them from the uſurpation of man's cenſorious judgment; yet it conſtantly adviſeth them not to uſe this liberty *for a cloak* of wickedneſs, which is the worſt abuſe; but *as the ſervants of God*, to whom for the leaſt abuſe of it they are accountable, to which maſter they

they muſt either *ſtand or fall.* But we paſs to the ſecond great abuſe of this world, which is

2*dly*, When it is miſapplied to the purpoſes of miſchief: the former related to our ſelves, this chiefly to others.

And this abuſe of the world is too general: for ſo many are the neceſſities of ſome, ſo great the ambition of others, and ſo corrupt the paſſions of the generality among men; that intereſt is found to have an univerſal ſway, and if I may ſo ſpeak, a ſort of omnipotence, *ſubduing all things to itſelf.* When therefore wealth and power in conjunction, when this united intereſt of the world ſhall be employed to overcome and captivate the virtue of ſome, and the integrity of others; to make the virtue of ſome ſaleable, and the integrity of others mercenary; when in juſtice it ſhall be a corrupter, in religion a ſeducer, in government an incendiary, it is proſtituted to the worſt purpoſe, to the higheſt abuſe. The abuſes of pleaſures fall chiefly upon the abuſer; and the miſchief generally terminates within the narrow circle of a family. But the abuſe of power has a wide circumference, able not only to diſturb families; but according to that objection, ſo miſplaced on the preachers

of the goſpel, this is that, that *turns the world upſide down.*

There is indeed a laudable ambition in men, founded on worthy and noble intentions; namely, when they aſpire to be great in order to be good, and to obtain the advantage of an higher ſtation, only that their power to do good may have a larger compaſs and line of working. There have been in all ages many worthies, beſides thoſe that ſtand upon the catalogue of the ſon of *Sirach*, *ſuch as have left a name behind them, men renowned for their power.* Why? becauſe *the Lord hath wrought great glory by them thro' his great power* lodged in them *from the beginning.* In like manner, whoſoever ſhall direct and dedicate their power to the ſervice of the Giver, in advancing the good of mankind, and thereby the glory of God, bleſſed are they above men: bleſſed in their name; for they *are the glory of their times*, and the praiſe of poſterity: bleſſed in their ſeed, which ſhall ſtand faſt and flouriſh for their ſakes: but bleſſed above all in their expectations: for ſince every man ſhall receive in the next world according to his works in this, what a glorious recompence muſt await thoſe, that have done good *in high places?* yea, *mighty* good *men ſhall be mightily* rewarded.

Eccluſ.44.

But

But let us paſs to that more common and inferior way of abuſing this world, which is

3dly, When the chief things of it, riches and honours, are miſapplied to the purpoſes of vanity: wherein, as we obſerved, the abuſe tends not to the debauchery of our natures, not to the injury of others; but chiefly to the damage and waſting of the things themſelves.

Now vanity is a relative thing, and muſt be meaſured from the rank and proportion, which men hold in the world. For it is as often ſeen, tho' with a much worſe appearance among the lower ranks, as well as the higher orders of mankind; rendring indeed the former very juſtly the ſubjects of deriſion, but the latter as unjuſtly the ſubjects of admiration.

But it muſt be confeſſed, and it may be complained of, that among the general expenſes of both, (but eſpecially of the great) vanity has too great a proportion. And it is then leaſt excuſable, when it mixes imprudence with extravagance; diſplaying itſelf in the ways of luxury, where the things periſh with the uſing; or of oſtentation, where they paſs away in the ſhew. Now all theſe vanities being ſuperior to mens abilities, look big and ſo draw the eyes of the world not thro' their

own greatneſs, but meerly thro' their diſproportion; which when found in mens fortunes, as well as their perſons, is equally gazed upon: but alas! not for its excellency, but irregularity.

There are indeed Phariſaical men, yea a ſect of ſuch Phariſees, hypocrites; who under pretence of zeal think all miſplaced on vanity, which is not directly converted to works of charity: who, if any thing be expended on the ornamental parts of life, as the box of ointment was poured on our Saviour againſt his death, preſently cry out with Judas, *what need of this waſte?* But the maintainers of that hard ſaying are traitors to the Chriſtian religion, as the author of it was to Chriſt. For that requires no ſuch thing from its followers, no ſuch regard to the poor to the diſregard of our ſelves in things that are ſuitable to the decency and ſtate of life; but only among the various expenſes of every ſtate, it recommends charity as *a more excellent way*. And among all the ways of uſing this world, this truly is the moſt excellent. For this is ſo far from debaſing it by an abuſe, that on the contrary it exalts it above itſelf. For charity conſecrates, what was made for common uſe; and ſo changes that into an offering, which the generality of men ſet up as their idol.

1 Cor. xii. 31.

To

To wind up this firſt head; let all men in their ſeveral ranks ſo uſe the world, as to avoid theſe three great abuſes, *viz.* of its pleaſures, its powers, and its riches: Let them not abuſe its pleaſures to intemperance, nor its powers to injuriouſneſs, nor its riches to vanity. For theſe are the great ruling luſts, which rule in the children of this world, and which govern their actions, and fix their affections here. But it muſt not be ſo with thoſe, who believe and expect a world to come, a better and more durable world, which claims and which deſerves their affections. For as to this world, *it paſſeth away, and the luſts thereof.* Which leads me

2*dly*, To enforce the obſervance of the advice given in the text, namely, in uſing the things of the world to avoid the abuſes of them, from the argument ſubjoined, becauſe of their continual change and uncertainty: *For the faſhion of this world paſſeth away.*

Now to give force to this argument, it will be neceſſary to ſhew the truth of the obſervation, on which it is grounded: and this will fully appear, if we caſt but a tranſient view over the natural and moral world, and upon the natures and durations of men and things therein. And

1*ſt*, If we look into the natural world, tho' the form and face of nature be in general the ſame, *all things continuing as they were from the beginning*; yet it is ſubſiſted by a circulation of years and interchange of ſeaſons: ſo that all things given to man for food and entertainment, do year by year become new. By which variety, in the uſe of things, God ſeems to have provided chiefly againſt ſatiety in the uſer; and to have taken care rather that man ſhould not be cloy'd with the repetition, than overpleaſed with the enjoyment. But the faſhion of this habitable world is changed in nothing more, than in the ſucceſſion of its inhabitants, frail men; who paſs away in their ſeveral generations, and come not again. And tho' their continuance here be but ſhort, bounded by *threeſcore years and ten*; yet this is cut ſhorter by a thouſand accidents. So that by looking into the regiſters of mortality, where theſe accidents are collated, the generality of mankind are found not to live out half their days. The greateſt half of human race are haſtned off the ſtage of the world, either in their infancy, as ſoon as they enter upon it; or in their youth, before they become actors. Wherefore ſince the ties of the deareſt relation, of the ſtricteſt compact, of the cloſeſt friendſhip, muſt be ſoon ſever'd by

by the courſe of nature, and probably much ſooner by the diſaſters of the world, ſurely the only wiſe and rational conduct of all perſons in their ſeveral relations, ſtates and enjoyments, is to poſſeſs them, tho' with a ſincere, yet always reſigned affection; to be *as tho' they poſſeſſed* them *not:* ſince in the compaſs of a few years theſe outward relations will be diſſolved of courſe, and become as tho' they had never been.

But the *faſhion of this world paſſeth away*, not only by the riſe and diſſolution of men and things, in the courſes of nature and viciſſitudes of fortune; but alſo

2*dly*, from the continued alteration in their virtues and qualities, for which we place our value and affection upon them.

No one loves a friend or a ſon, meerly as they are men, but as a friend or a ſon. But how often does the man outlive the friend? and the ſon live, when he is *no more worthy to be called a ſon?* And this diſobedience of children and defection of friends, is much more affecting than their deaths. For this latter we look upon as the irreſiſtible law of nature, to which all muſt ſubmit: but the former we look upon as the voluntary acts of baſeneſs, which we cannot but reſent. And when by advancement in years we have

met with many examples (and many we all meet with) of friendſhip changed into enmity, affection into averſion, integrity into diſſimulation, and duty into diſobedience, the ſtage of the world ſeems ſtrangely alter'd, and to carry a new faſhion and face of things.

But not only, 1*ſt*, the perpetual changes in the natures of men and things, as well as 2*dly*, in thoſe excellencies and qualities for which we value them, make the faſhion of the world ſeem to paſs away; but further

3*dly*, A continual change in our opinions of them, tho' they ſhould remain in the ſame perfection.

For our opinions vary with our age: and in paſſing from youth to old age, I may venture to affirm, that man undergoes fewer alterations in his body, than in his mind. Our underſtandings may be ſaid to have their growth, and their different dimenſions: ſo that what in their infancy appeared to them great and magnificent, when they are enlarged and as it were come to their full ſtature, then ſeems to them little and deſpicable. And if our underſtandings be ſubject to ſuch variations which come on with our years, how much more muſt our mutable wills with their inclinations and affections? *When I was a child*, as *I thought*, ſo was I pleaſed *as a child:*

child: but when I became a man, then in deſires, as well as in thoughts, *I put away childiſh things*. Neither are our inclinations more fixed in our manhood, than they were in our infancy. For as the trivial enjoyments of children become not only diſagreeable, but ridiculous to men; no leſs do thoſe, which are calculated to the reliſh of middle age, become as inſipid and the ſcorn of grey hairs; by whom theſe called manly pleaſures are put away too in their turn, but *as childiſh things*.

Thus may it not be ſaid, that the very faſhion of our minds *paſſeth away?* for alas! our judgment and memories wax old, and our natural appetites, one after another, die before us. And from hence come the praiſes of old men of former times, and complaints againſt the preſent: whereas this change is not from without, neither from any greater corruption of the world, or degeneracy in men or things; but only from the forementioned changes in the mind, which is gradually taught by experience to take up new opinions, and compelled by nature to fly to new inclinations.

But the faſhion of the world will ſeem to paſs away more viſibly,

4*thly*, If we extend our view, beyond our ſelves and the narrow circle of our own changeable affairs and relations, to the perpetual

tual changes in the great moral world. For if we conſider the great motions in government and ſucceſſion of governours, new counſels in ſtate, new ſects in religion, the gentle innovations of time in cuſtoms, in commerce, in habits, and in language; and the violent ones of faction, the tide whereof, like that of the troubled ſea, is *always caſting up mire and dirt*; and which ebbing and flowing continually, gives no reſt to the affairs and minds of men: again, if we join to what we ſee at home, what we hear of in other parts, *nation riſing againſt nation, and kingdom againſt kingdom*, the civil diſtractions of ſome, and the invaſions and oppreſſions of others, the current of war paſſing with a great noiſe from one kingdom to another people: farther yet, if we enquire of the ages that went before, and the days that are paſt, and add to all we have ſeen at home and heard from abroad, alſo what we read of in ancient times; and obſerve the fall of one empire upon the riſe of another, and the great tranſmigrations of nations, led from the eaſt and from the weſt and from the north, God removing them and their bounds to and fro upon the earth: if we look back ſtill farther, not only to the nations and times of which we read, but alſo to thoſe of which we read not: if we con-

ſider that the one half of time ſince the world began, in which there were nations greater and mightier than all that have been ſince, hath no footſteps, no records in hiſtory, but what are found in the ſhort account of *Moſes*, that all theſe nations and their memorials and even the names of many, are utterly vaniſhed: if we thus view at once the whole table of antiquity, reaching backwards almoſt ſix thouſand years, and conſider that on this latter half are engraven infinite changes, and that the former is eraſed and left quite blank: from ſuch a view as this, we muſt abundantly be convinced, that *the faſhion of this world* hath been and ſtill is ſubject to continual interchange and viciſſitudes, and that nothing continues at a ſtay.

'Tis true, theſe great changes in the world, ancient and modern, may not affect us in any part, breaking perhaps at a diſtance from the narrow compaſs of our abodes and of our days upon earth; yet they ſtill ought to have their uſes upon our minds, and upon our behaviour in our paſſage over it. We ſhould draw the ſame improvements from theſe ſucceſſive alterations in the ſcenes of the world and all things acted thereon, as St. *Peter* doth from its final diſſolution, the breaking down of the theatre it ſelf. For as he infers, *ſeeing* 2 Pet. 3. xi.

ing all theſe things ſhall be finally *diſſolved*; ſo we may ſay, ſeeing all theſe things have been and are daily diſſolved to us, *what manner of perſons ought we to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs?* how ſhould we fix our affections and bend our actions towards the other world, which abideth for ever? how looſe and indifferent ſhould we ſit to this, where there is nothing fixed; which we behold to paſs away with the ſtream of time, as we read it did from the beginning, and as we believe it will do to the end, till time and that ſhall be no more?

From what has been ſaid, let us all conſider and uſe this world but as a paſſage to a better countrey. Let not the greateſt of men think it any diminution to confeſs what *David* confeſſed, and all the fathers before him, that they were but *ſtrangers and ſojourners upon earth*. This was the confeſſion of *Abraham* himſelf: he was not aſhamed to declare himſelf a *ſtranger*, yea, a *pilgrim on the earth*, who was a great father of many people, yea, who was call'd the friend of God; and in compariſon of whom it might in all ages be juſtly ſaid to any man, (except him to whom it was ſaid) *art thou greater than our father Abraham?* This was the confeſſion likewiſe of aged *Iſrael*, the great father

Pſ. xxxix. 12.

Heb. xi. 13.

father of the patriarchs, when he ſtood before *Pharaoh* and his court; neither were his words unſuitable to the dignity of his audience: *Jacob ſaid unto the king, the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of my fathers in their pilgrimage.* Gen. xlvii. 9.

There is ſo great a mixture of evil and uncertainty in every condition, that he that lives longeſt and happieſt in the world, muſt upon a juſt calculation confeſs with *Jacob, that few and evil have the days of his life been.* This is ſo confeſſed a truth, that were the ſuppoſition of *Nicodemus* really practicable, could a man be born again when he is old, and were it put to his choice to enter a ſecond time upon this ſcene of life, I am perſuaded no man living would accept the offer, and return again to his cradle. No: we find the wiſer heathen, tho' he had no certainty of a future life, yet proteſting againſt the repeating of this; chuſing rather at his death to drop into annihilation, than to tread again the ſame round of vanities.

For in truth, what elſe is the life of man? the firſt part of it, to wit, childhood and youth,

youth, is doubtleſs vanity; and the latter part, to wit, old age, is vexation; and the beſt portion of this ſpan which lies between them, what is it but a mixture of both? our beſt actions, ſtudies, and deſigns, if they ſucceed, are generally little better than Vanity: and if they ſucceed not, are nothing but vexation.

For to make a gueſs at the vanity of all the reſt, what are the aims and acquiſitions of the great, which ſeem to have ſomething in them? what the aims of the *many wiſemen after the fleſh*, whom we admire? what of the *many mighty*, whom we fear? what of the *many noble*, whom we envy? doubtleſs he that by his wiſdom encreaſeth wealth and honours, at the ſame time encreaſeth labour and ſorrow; and 'tis by great pains, as the wiſe *Bacon* remarks, that men aſcend to far greater pains. And what are the ends of all theſe pains, when they return again to the duſt and all their thoughts periſh, all their Schemes wherewith they ſo diſquieted themſelves and the world in vain; when they ſhall return alſo naked as they came, ſtripp'd of all their honours, treaſures, attendants, friendſhips, and dependencies; when they ſhall make their grave with the poor, and their bed with the beggar;

beggar; and ſhall have the ſame common relations, even the worm and corruption? ſurely if *every man living*, much more every man dying, *is altogether vanity*.

Hear then the concluſion of the whole matter: ſince this world is but a paſſage (and that a very ſhort one) to another, which is eternal: and ſince all the goods of it are given us for our ſeveral accommodations while we travel over it; let us therefore accept theſe gifts of a good Creator with thankfulneſs, but uſe them with moderation: let us not like *Cynicks*, reject them with ingratitude; much leſs like *Epicures*, embrace them with indulgence; leaſt of all like miſers, hoard them up with covetouſneſs, which is idolatry: For if they muſt not be the objects of our affection, much leſs of our adoration. Laſtly, ſince they are given us not only as comforts for our uſe, but alſo as talents for improvement and to traffick withal; let us therefore put part thereof to the exchange of good works; let us, like wiſe merchants, by frequent acts of charity make large remittances into that better country, before we embark: always begging of God to give us ſuch abſtinence in uſing, and ſuch diligence in improving them, that (according to the Collect of our Church)

Church) " he being our ruler and guide, we
" may ſo paſs thro' things temporal, as finally
" to loſe not the things eternal. *Amen.*

F I N I S.